

before I cede to the Senator from Pennsylvania, but sometimes, with these giant bills, strange things pop out at the end of the day, and you kind of wonder how they got in. Wouldn't it be great if, on this mini giant bill, one of the things that popped out might be the promised relief for our miners in terms of healthcare and their pensions? This is something I believe, we, as a country, owe to the miners—back, yes, to President Truman's promise in 1946.

I stand with all of my colleagues on this issue. I particularly thank, again, my friend the Senator from West Virginia for his great leadership and his willingness to stand tall time and again. Let's see if we can get it done this time.

With that, Madam President, I yield to the Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I thank, first of all, the Senator from Virginia for fighting for his coal miners in Southwest Virginia.

They have been out there fighting in Westmoreland, and we have 1,200 miners about ready to lose everything that we had to fight for to gain. They are going to lose their pensions. They are going to lose, also, the healthcare. We have to get them in the bill. We have to get our trust fund on the black lung restored.

Mr. WARNER. Right, all we have to try to do with the trust fund is to get it back to the status quo.

Mr. MANCHIN. I am going to make one more plea to the President. I will do that after my good friend and senior Senator from Pennsylvania speaks about his miners, whom he supports.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I thank the senior Senator from West Virginia for his time today, but, more importantly, as the Senator from Virginia, Mr. WARNER, said, Senator MANCHIN has fought harder than anyone in this Chamber on behalf of men and women, whether they are coal miners or their families or their spouses.

This is a very simple debate. It is not a debate about some far-off, complex issue. This is about a promise—a promise that was made to coal miners and their families in the 1940s.

The only question—a real simple question—is that we are either going to keep the promise or not. It is as simple as that. Both parties, both Houses, and the administration—this is not complicated. We made substantial progress, but it took far too long, and there are some people in this Chamber who have been blocking it for far too long on healthcare. We got that done. That is the good news.

The bad news is, the pension issue is still unresolved. There is still a lot of suffering, a lot of uncertainty, a lot of trauma because two branches of government haven't done enough for these families.

I come from a State where large portions of our State were dependent upon the sweat and the blood of working

men and women, especially coal miners. Stephen Crane, the great novelist, wrote an essay in the early 1900s—actually late 1800s—about all of the dangers in a coal mine and all of the ways a miner could die. He described the mine as a place of “inscrutable darkness” and “a soundless place of tangible loneliness.” That is how he described the work of the coal miner.

I know we made progress in the intervening generation since then, but that work has always been difficult. It has always been dark and dangerous, but the people who did it kept their promise. They kept their promise to their employer to work every day and kept their promise to their family. Many of them kept their promise to their country when they served in World War II or Korea or Vietnam or any conflict after that, even up to the present day—but especially those who were serving in those years.

The only question is whether this government and all of us here—and both parties are on the hook here—whether we are going to keep our promise along with this administration and any future administration. It is as simple as that.

We have some work to do here to make sure that promise is fulfilled. These families, these miners have already kept their promise. They are done. This isn't something extra we are giving them.

All we are doing is our part. We are obligated here, and I am grateful that the senior Senator from West Virginia and others have worked together to make sure that this issue is front and center, even as we are dealing with a range of other issues.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I will wrap up now, and I want to, first of all, thank the Senator from Pennsylvania and the Senators from West Virginia and Ohio for speaking so eloquently for the people who have worked so hard for our country.

This has been a bipartisan movement. This has been bipartisan. I thank all of my Republican colleagues for supporting the hard-working people they all had in their States. We all benefited from the energy they produced for our great country, to defend ourselves in two wars. We had the greatest economy—the only superpower in the world—because of what they have done every day and the sacrifices they have made for us.

Mr. President, if you are watching, if you get a copy of this tape, I am pleading with you. I am pleading with you, Mr. President, on behalf of 87,000 retirees: Please help us. One phone call from you to Majority Leader MCCONNELL to support and adopt the American Miners Act of 2019, which is S. 27—ask him to take this up immediately. We can put it on the bill that we are about ready to open to keep the government open or he can take immediate action. But, Mr. President, you can make a difference. These are peo-

ple who supported you, and I know you support them, and this is the way you can show it.

They are only asking for what they worked for. It does not cost the government one penny of debt—not one penny of debt for the taxpayers. We have pay-fors. It has been bipartisan. It came out of the Finance Committee in a bipartisan movement under the leadership of Senator HATCH. I am very grateful for that.

You will see the miners going around; they make an effort every week, faithfully, to come here. There are real faces, real people, real families who are involved and affected by our inaction. We are asking for your help, Mr. President.

I yield the floor, respectfully.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

MAINTAINING AIR FORCE STRENGTH

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I rise today to support the Air Force's plan to expand the 386 operational squadrons.

Since the earliest days of flight, the United States has been an aviation leader. From the time of the U.S. Army Air Corps through today's modern U.S. Air Force, our Nation has always been at the forefront of air combat.

From air-to-air combat to aerial refueling, to the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance conducted by the planes of Nebraska's own 55th Wing, the U.S. Air Force is renowned as the dominant force in the sky.

Recent developments have put that advantage at risk. Around the world, nations are rapidly modernizing their capabilities by investing millions in their air forces and air defenses, threatening our ability to claim and maintain air superiority.

Rapid advances in anti-access/area-denial technology and a coordinated, calibrated effort by nations like China and Russia pose a significant threat to our ability to operate in contested airspace.

For decades, we have been accustomed to flying unconstrained, fighting adversaries on the ground that lack modern technology and the ability to seriously threaten our freedom to conduct aerial missions.

The face of 21st century warfare is changing. Competitors are rapidly closing the gap, and while our Air Force remains the most professional and effective air combat force in the world, these nations are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into matching and exceeding our capability.

We have a choice. If we fail to react, we risk falling behind and losing the air dominance that has been essential to U.S. national security for decades. We cannot sit back and accept that possibility.

We must meet this challenge head-on. The United States must adapt, invest, and show the world that we will never cede control of the skies to our enemies.

Recently, the Air Force conducted a rigorous analysis of future air combat

scenarios that we could face in the coming decades. Utilizing over 2,000 simulations based on the latest intelligence to assess force performance against strategic competitors, the Air Force produced a model of the requirements necessary to fulfill the goals of the national defense strategy.

This analysis found that we will need an array of advanced capabilities to counter ongoing and robust military modernization by our competitors. The assessment determined that we must focus our own modernization around several key areas to ensure our continued ability to defend the homeland and to defeat strategic threats.

Perhaps most critically, this analysis, which the Air Force calls “the Air Force We Need,” has determined that to be effective in achieving these goals, we must grow the Air Force to 386 operational squadrons.

Given the growing threats we face, the Air Force will play a key role in any future conflict. That is why I believe it is imperative that we act on this analysis and align the necessary resources to bridge the gap between the Air Force we have and the Air Force we need and reach that goal of 386 squadrons.

The need to grow the Air Force is not some arbitrary desire for more planes. The reality is that, even today, our Air Force is too small, and it is stretched too thin to properly execute all of its missions.

Right now, the Air Force has 39 percent fewer aircraft and 58 percent fewer combat-coded fighter squadrons than it did during Operation Desert Storm, and it is struggling to maintain a rapidly aging fleet. All the while, Russia and China continue to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into new technology and equipment that is designed to seize control of the sky.

That is why it is imperative that we act to provide the resources necessary to grow to 386 operational squadrons. We simply cannot face these challenges with one of the smallest Air Forces we have ever had. That is a recipe for disaster. It is a recipe for defeat.

Instead, we must rebuild the fleet. We must increase flying hours, improve training, add pilots and maintainers, and retain the best airmen we have. We have to act now, without delay.

While the “Air Force We Need” adds significantly to the physical capability of our Air Force, it is about more than simply adding equipment to the flight line. This plan will also modernize the way we fight. With an increased focus on “jointness” and integration with advanced technology like unmanned systems and artificial intelligence, we can continue adapting to stay ahead of our enemies, all of whom have spent years watching and learning from us in the field.

As a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I commend the Air Force for putting forward a bold vision for the future. I believe if we truly are to execute the goals of the

national defense strategy, this is the kind of analysis and planning that has to happen, and it must be followed by action from Congress.

That is why I urge my colleagues in the Senate to join me in supporting a robust defense budget and investing in the enhanced capability the Air Force needs to continue its mission of protecting the American people.

At this critical juncture in the Nation’s history and amid a fundamental shift in the type of threats we face, now is not the time to let partisanship get in the way of what must be done to continue supporting our airmen and maintainers. Let’s work together so that we can build the Air Force that we need so that, above all else, the world knows that the U.S. Air Force will never allow any adversary to dictate how, when, and where we fly.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF WILLIAM BARR

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to speak regarding the nomination of William Barr to serve as the next Attorney General of our country.

First, I want to take a few minutes to reflect on the circumstances surrounding this vacancy. I believe that every Member of this Chamber should use this occasion to decide, ultimately, whether we believe Mr. Barr will be the Attorney General for all Americans or whether Mr. Barr will be the Attorney General, really, for one American.

When President-elect Trump selected then-Senator Jeff Sessions, our colleague from Alabama, to serve as Attorney General for this country, it brought me no joy to vote against our long-time colleague and friend. The truth was, though, that our views too often diverged on too many important issues that included immigration, healthcare, civil rights, voting rights, LGBT rights, environmental protection, and more.

After considerable prayer and reflection, I reached the conclusion that Senator Sessions would not be an Attorney General for all Americans.

Unfortunately, during his tenure at the Department of Justice, he went on to preside over a number of divisive policies and decisions, including the Muslim ban, overturning protections for Dreamers and asylum seekers, enacting a cruel policy of family separation at our southern border, and failing to defend the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act in court.

I have not been shy about expressing my disagreement with these decisions,

and others, made by the Department of Justice during the current administration. However, one area where I strongly agreed with Attorney General Sessions was his decision to recuse himself from the special counsel’s investigation into Russian interference in our 2016 elections.

One of my core values is to figure out what is the right thing to do and to try to do it—not what is politically expedient, not what is easy but what is the right thing to do. After it became clear that then-Senator Sessions provided testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee that called into question his impartiality on matters relating to Russia and the 2016 election, Attorney General Sessions recused himself from all matters related to the 2016 Presidential election. That was the right thing to do. It certainly wasn’t what our President wanted him to do. The President has said as much repeatedly. I should say that, maybe, he has tweeted as much repeatedly.

The President repeatedly admonished Attorney General Sessions for doing what I think many of us believe was the right thing to do. Here is what the President tweeted on June 5, 2018:

The Russian Witch Hunt Hoax continues, all because Jeff Sessions didn’t tell me he was going to recuse himself . . . I would have quickly picked someone else. So much time and money wasted, so many lives ruined . . . and Sessions knew better than most that there was No Collusion!

Let me be clear, Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation is not a witch hunt. It is, in fact, the unanimous opinion of the U.S. intelligence Agencies and law enforcement community that Russia attacked our democracy and interfered in our 2016 elections.

As a result of the special counsel’s ongoing investigation, 34 individuals and 3 companies have been indicted or pled guilty to a range of crimes. This includes the Trump campaign manager, the Trump deputy campaign manager, Mr. Trump’s National Security Advisor, and, most recently, President Trump’s longtime political advisor.

Special Counsel Mueller is a lifelong Republican who served with distinction in the Vietnam war. I think I am the last Member of this body who served in the Vietnam war, but he served there with real distinction. He served with distinction as our FBI Director following the September 11 attacks. He is not conducting a partisan witch hunt. He and the team he leads are striving to find out the truth and, in doing so, help us prevent future attacks on our democracy.

I believe we should be doing everything in our power to allow Special Counsel Mueller and his team to conduct and complete this investigation free from political interference and partisan games.

During the years I was privileged to serve as chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, Bob Mueller was the head of the FBI. I had a chance to work